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Veterans group turns to Innovation Studio for fellowship, therapy



Every Thursday afternoon, the **Nebraska Innovation Studio** (<https://innovationstudio.unl.edu/>) machine shop lathes are circled by a group of veterans learning and honing their woodturning skills.

The hands-on lessons also double as therapy sessions.

Woodturning is a simple task, but requires concentration. That focus quiets thoughts the veterans may be struggling with, said Jim Young, a Vietnam War veteran and founder of the Veterans in Recovery program.

“They can come here and be successful at starting and finishing something,” the retired Navy man said. “And be proud that they did it.”

Young started Veterans in Recovery in partnership with Nebraska Innovation Studio after he moved to Lincoln to be closer to his son. He previously volunteered for a similar program, Turn Around for Veterans, in San Diego.

Young donated three lathes to get the program started. He also worked with Innovation Studio shop manager Jerry Reif and director David Martin to secure funding and a fourth

lathe, which was donated by a fellow woodturner in Lincoln.

The program has been meeting weekly at Innovation Studio for about a year. Vets are referred to the program from the Veterans Administration in Lincoln and the university's Military and Veteran Success Center. Membership fees are waived, thanks to a generous anonymous donor.

"Once they do the training with me, they can come in on their own time, too, and do whatever they like," Young said. "That's a huge advantage of having a place like Innovation Studio."

Marlene Sorenson, a peer support specialist with the Lincoln Veterans Administration, said the program has been very beneficial to the veterans she serves. The vets who participate range widely in their therapeutic needs, spanning from severe post-traumatic stress disorder to a disability or dealing with loneliness. The program is designed to complement each treatment plan.

"Our whole motivation is to get veterans into action, into the community. They come and learn, and then become teachers," Sorenson, a Husker alumna, said. "They find a home here they look forward to coming to and creating something."

Young said he'd like to see similar programs across the United States, but it's hard to get them going without scientific data showing the impact. Jihan Najjar, a doctoral student in the counseling psychology program, is hoping to help provide that data through research and is leading a pilot study of the Nebraska program's therapeutic benefits.

"I have seen firsthand how this program positively impacts veteran's mental health, social relationships and physical health," Najjar, who also serves as therapist at the Lincoln VA hospital, said. "I am exploring how participating in projects at Innovation Studio impacts veterans' well-being, as well as identifying the efficacy of alternative treatment methods for veterans."

by [Deann Gayman | University Communication](#)

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